

Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

THE GARDEN CALENDAR

A radio discussion by W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 50 associate NBC radio stations, Thursday, January 2, 1936.

Hello Folks. It's been a long time since I had a chat with you, and, now as the holiday season is over and we are just starting on the new year I am sure a lot of you are already making plans for activities in your orchards and gardens and for numerous improvements in and around your homes. Today a considerable portion of the country is blanketed with snow, which by the way is a good condition for that part of the country where snow is naturally to be expected. The snow is an ideal protection for all hardy plant life, that is provided it falls rather dry and does not blow and pile in drifts over our plants. Later the melting of the snows fill our soils with water ready for a good growing season next summer.

January is seed catalog time and very soon now we will be getting through the mails the seed catalogs of the various seed houses that are ready to supply our wants for seeds, plants, fertilizers, tools, and in fact everything that we may need for use in our orchards and gardens. It is a little too early to predict just what will be offered in the line of new varieties, but I'll wager a guess that the crop of novelties and new things will be as large, if not a little larger, than usual. My only suggestion is that you try these novelties out on a small scale at first and depend mostly upon the old true and tried sorts until the newer things prove to be better than what you have been growing. Don't turn down the new things but give them a small trial. I say this because many of the newer things have not been fully tested as to their adaptation for growing under a wide range of soil and climatic variations.

I am receiving numerous letters asking about the new Glovel tomato and where seed can be secured. Now the Glovel tomato was originated jointly by the workers in the United States Department of Agriculture and the Florida Experiment Station, and has been selected primarily for Florida conditions. We know that it is a good tomato to grow in Florida and the region along the Gulf of Mexico, but, we do not know what it will do in the northern tomato growing sections. Arrangements are being made to place seed in the hands of experiment station workers in different parts of the country for trial and in the course of the coming season we will learn more about this new tomato. The Rutgers, another new tomato, originated in New Jersey, is attracting attention. I believe a small amount of the seed of this new variety will be on sale this season, but I shall try it on a small scale to see if it is any improvement over Marglobe and Pritchard and some more of the older varieties under my conditions.

Naturally you folks who are on fruit and truck farms are asking the question, "What are the prospects for the season of 1936." I wish I could tell you, but, you know the only way we can judge the future is by the past. The outlook report, issued a little over a month ago, shows that there has been a steady increase in the production of vegetables during the past 10 years. True there was a 10 percent reduction in 1933 but this was followed by a 6 percent increase in 1934 and a 4 percent increase in 1935. The production of the 17 important truck crops increased about 3 percent in 1935 over that of the year 1934, while the acreage increased about 4 percent.

(over)

I want to call your attention to one point, and that is, the increased production of the important vegetable crops has been due to increased acreage and that yields per acre have declined, in fact during the ten-year period ending in 1931 there was a decline of 16 percent in yields per acre. Since 1931 the rate of decline, according to the Outlook Report, has been much slower and there is evidence that the rapid downward trend has been checked. Increased acreage of truck crops and lower yields will never get us anywhere and the sooner that trend is corrected the better.

It is not my intention to burden you with figures but these are things that are worth thinking about, for it is a well-known fact that low yields and low profits go hand in hand and that within certain limitations, the greatest margin between cost of production and returns is where the acre yields are reasonably high. Occasionally we hear of a crop of lettuce or tomatoes or cabbage, or any of the 17 important market vegetables, that give an enormous yield and brought so and so on the market, but very little is said about the high cost of growing the crop and that is what really counts after all.

Many of you southern gardeners will be planting your spring crops during the latter part of this month and my advice to you would be to do just a little better job of planting than usual, prepare the ground very thoroughly, fertilize liberally but within the bounds of economy, get good seed, watch for the most favorable time for planting and give the crop good care throughout. By doing this you may be able to increase the spread between cost of production and returns.

Within a short time our northern gardeners will be starting plants indoors and getting everything ready for the coming season. Some of you may be interested in obtaining a copy of our bulletin on hotbeds and coldframes, or our little mimeograph on sash greenhouses, and if so let me know. The hotbed bulletin is Farmers' Bulletin No. 1743, but please write your name and address plainly. We receive a great many letters and post cards on which either the name or address is indistinct and it always makes me feel disappointed to write someone a letter and have it returned for better address.

For the northern grower, earliness is of prime importance with many of the crops, and that is where a small plant-house or a good set of hotbeds and coldframes is of great help in getting plants started early, especially the plants of such crops as tomatoes, peppers and eggplant.

I am frequently asked by eastern growers how they can grow good head lettuce in the early part of the season. My answer is - start the plants in a greenhouse, have them good, large husky fellows when the weather is warm enough to plant them outdoors - and, mature the heads of lettuce before hot weather strikes them.

I have been able to grow just as fine lettuce of the Iceberg type in my garden as I have ever seen coming from the Imperial Valley of California, but I have the plants started early and the crop ready for use before the hot weather sets in.

Speaking of increasing the spread or margin between cost of production and the prices received for fruits and vegetables, I want to just remark that one of the best ways of accomplishing this is through proper grading and marketing. I have seen so many cases where a nice profit has slipped away from a grower simply

because he didn't properly grade and pack his products. I am not going into a discussion of grading and packing, but I would like you to have this in mind all the time that you are growing your crops. Sometimes a handful of culls mixed with the first-grade products will cause the whole package to sell at cull prices.

Just a word on this second day of the New Year about improvement of home surroundings during 1936. Don't you think that it will pay you, if you have not already done so, to make a little sketch or plan of the grounds around your home then proceed to make the most necessary and desirable improvements during the spring and summer?

If you do not have shrubbery growing around your house foundation, if you do not have a flower garden, and a good home vegetable garden, why not make 1936 a banner year in the general improvement, not only of your home surroundings, but in the way of producing the things that add the comfort and happiness of your living?

I am going to confess that my 1935 garden was pretty much of a failure due to my own neglect to give it the proper attention, but I have made one resolution, that is, I am going to do just a little better with my garden in 1936. If I can be of any assistance to you in solving your problems please call upon me and for the present, I am wishing you each and all a very prosperous and happy New Year.

- - - - -

